

Partnership
Music Education
Policy Development

A MICHIGAN THINK TANK

Michigan House of Representatives Education Committee
Lansing, MI 48909
January 28, 2014

Dear Chairperson Lyons and Members of the Michigan House Education Committee:

Thank you for taking our testimony today regarding HB 5223 and the matter of teacher evaluation. We, the Partnership for Music Education Policy Development (PMEPD), are a non-partisan, non-profit organization seeking to improve music education in Michigan's schools through the creation and implementation of effective policy. Our board members are veteran educators representing every phase of music instruction, from elementary general music to the music teacher preparation programs of our largest state universities.

PMEPD recently reviewed HB 5223. While we heartily support a "fair" system of evaluation—as the bill purports to establish—there are several provisions in the bill that we believe violate the fairness principle. We are recommending several revisions to the current language that we believe will improve and strengthen the bill.

First, there is too large of an emphasis on individual student growth in the overall model. We believe 50% is too much weight to place on either standardized or non-standardized assessments. The validity of such practice is questionable, as a student's learning is dependent on a number of factors over which individual teachers have no control or influence (e.g., the health of the child and the family environment in which he/she lives). A review of history and the research literature shows that standardized assessments were originally designed to obtain baseline data that might influence and shape curricular design and reform; they were never intended to measure the effectiveness of individual teachers. We agree that student growth data is valuable and can improve teacher practice, but we believe that a weight of 50% within the context of an individual evaluation is problematic.

We support the use of three, not four, categorical designations of a teacher's effectiveness and suggest using "professional," "provisional," and "ineffective." These labels are consistent with the final recommendations of the Michigan Council on Educator Effectiveness (which suggested using three labels) and the current designations for teacher certification. The current language uses four levels: "highly qualified," "effective," "minimally effective," and "ineffective." Using two "effective" labels isn't necessary and causes undue stress on teachers.

The bill also stipulates “school-level growth goals may be used for an individual teacher’s evaluation if there is a *reasonable connection* of the core content to the teacher’s actual teaching assignment “ (page 20, lines 9-11, emphasis added). However, it is both *unreasonable* and invalid to use school-level data from core areas (e.g., math and reading standardized test scores) to assess the effectiveness of music teachers, a practice that has unfortunately been embraced by numerous administrators throughout the state looking for an easy way to evaluate non-core educators. For those disciplines for which state and/or national assessments have not been created, we believe locally-developed assessments in a teacher’s content area, agreed upon by both the teacher and the administrator, are a more reasonable and valid way to provide student growth data over which that teacher has had some degree of influence.

The observer should also have expertise in the content area being evaluated. However, sub-sections vi and vii of the bill (pages 22 and 23) only stipulate that the observer must be trained in the observation tool. While school administrators are best positioned to evaluate matters of general professionalism (e.g., promptness, collegiality in the work place, communication to parents, and dedication to the profession), they are not qualified to assess instructional efficacy within the context of a discipline in which they have no expertise. Therefore, we recommend that observations by experts in the applicable content area be included in the evaluation protocol (see our position statement, *Criteria for Evaluating a Viable Music Teacher Evaluation tool*, which is available on our website). For example, only a successful, experienced, and qualified music educator can provide a meaningful and accurate assessment of music pedagogy. The same is true for all content areas and disciplines.

Finally, Section B of the bill addresses “teacher and pupil attendance” (page 23, lines 24-25). Teacher attendance is directly impacted by collectively bargained contracts (i.e., sick days, professional leave days, etc.). It is unclear whether or not the bill as written takes that into consideration. The language also seems to imply that pupil attendance, over which the teacher has no control, will be considered, but it is unclear as to how it will influence the final evaluation.

If the goal of the bill is to raise the level of instruction by helping teacher’s improve their practice, then we believe the recommendations we offer here strengthen the bill substantially. These are our primary concerns, but PMEPPD has several other specific ideas that we believe will improve evaluation practices for Michigan’s music teachers, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas with each of you personally. Thank you for your consideration and for your attention to this most important matter.

For more information, email us at mich.pmeppd@gmail.com,
or visit our website at www.pmeppd.weebly.com

PMEPPD

Our mission is to bring together all Michigan music educators and music education organizations to promote a quality music education for every student in the State of Michigan.